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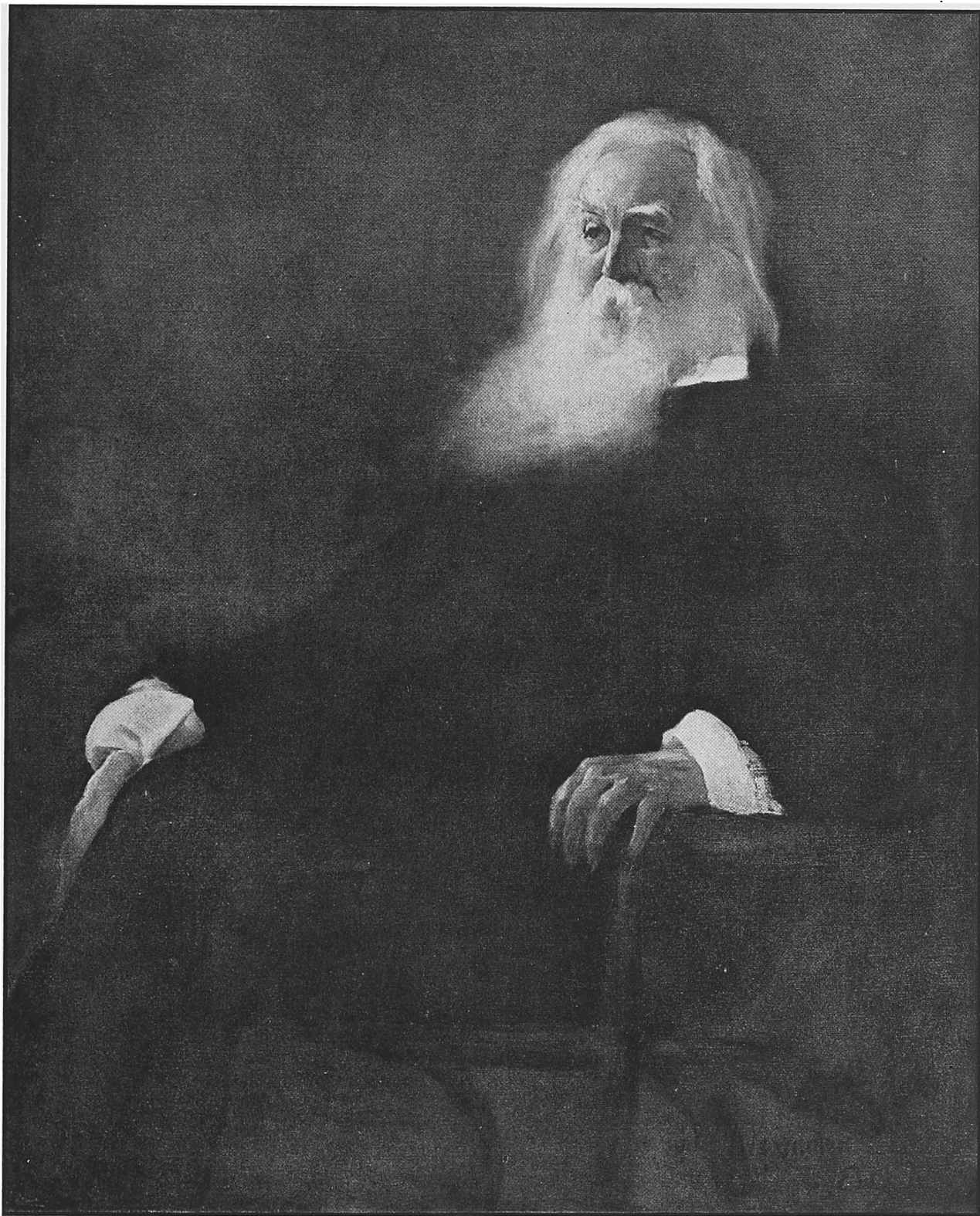
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*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum.*

**"WALT WHITMAN"**  
**BY JOHN W. ALEXANDER**

*(See opposite page)*

## JOHN W. ALEXANDER—PAINTER

*An address delivered at a meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters at the Chemists Club, New York March 8, 1917*

BY EDWIN H. BLASHFIELD

(See opposite page)

**I**N John White Alexander a frail body lodged a tireless, eager spirit, tireless and unquenched by illness to the very end, eager, not only in search for beauty, but in service to his fellows. Among artists, some are recorders, some arrangers, some are creators and some are dreamers of dreams.

Now and then comes a man who may belong to any one of these groups but who adds to his artistic gift and his technical acquirement a capacity for communication of enthusiasm to others and an instinctive desire to stimulate, to push at the wheels wherever he sees that they turn slowly. Such a man soon becomes a leader.

Towards leadership John Alexander gravitated instinctively and in it he established himself solidly, using the experience of one official position to affirm that of another, touching the circle of the Arts at many points in its circumference and strengthening himself by each fresh touch. If a man is strong enough physically to withstand the demands of such arduous effort, he gains enormously in the power to synthesize that effort and to build up from one department to another.

Alexander was not strong enough and he paid the physical penalty, but while his life lasted he never relaxed that effort, and he made it fruitful, feeding it always with persistent enthusiasm.

For an instance: in this synthesizing of effort he worked first as a member of the Metropolitan Art Museum's Board at increasing and safeguarding that museum's treasures, next as a member of the School Art League, he worked at the provision of intelligent appreciation of those treasures, appreciation planted in the minds of the children of the city to grow till it should reward the museum's effort with understanding, adult and trained.

He talked to the children who flocked to see the painting and sculpture and the art objects of all kinds.

And when the children went away he followed them to their East Side clubs and schools and talked to them again, encouraging them to try experiments of their own in painting and modelling, and he stimulated them with prizes which he adjudged and sometimes instituted. He loved this work among the children and he told me with a twinkle, and more than once, how these very young people managed to fortify the doubtful experiment of a journey into art by the undoubted pleasure of at least beginning that journey on roller-skates. "Dozens of them" said he "skate to their lecture." If he was busy with the children's welfare, the interests of his comrades of all ages busied him still more. He was a painter through and through; nevertheless, the sister arts of music and the drama claimed and obtained his time in one of his favorite fields of effort, the MacDowell Club.

To the plastic presentation of the drama, its costuming, lighting and colors, he gave enthusiastic attention, aided, almost always, by Mrs. Alexander. It was an easy progression for him from his can-

vases to the moving pictures of a pageant or a play, and his swift inventiveness enabled him to get through a prodigious amount of work in a short time, in such productions for instance as Miss Maude Adams's "Jeanne d'Arc" at the Harvard Stadium, or in the many series of tableaux which he arranged for charity. "If you have a frame and some gauze" said he to me "you have no idea how much you can do in a moment with a few colored rags." I had an idea, for I had seen him juggle with them and had admired the effects which he produced so easily, for he seemed to take pains easily and with a geniality which relieved his beneficiary from a sense of too great obligation. This graceful suavity was a potent factor in his helpfulness, but he was so smiling and kindly that I fear one did not always realize how much his ready service sometimes tired him.

During the last year of his life I saw him many times a week and we often came home together from the Academy council or from other committee meetings.

Although as I have said his spirit was not tired, his body was. Again and again he rose from a sick bed to preside upon a platform. His delicate features, which recalled some cavalier's portrait by Van Dyck, were at times during his last year almost transparent looking. And yet he was so resilient, he so responded to the stimulus of work to do, he had recovered so many times from severe attacks, that his death when it came was not only a great shock but was a surprise.

Critics, writers of books, will talk to us at length of his art; there is time to-day for only a briefest impression of it. One would say that a refinement, rising to distinction, was its most obvious quality. Pattern and lighting were what seemed to interest him most of all. Long, sweeping, curving lines he sought for or rather seemed to find without searching, and they gave a decorative character to all his portraits.

In his color, restraint was a notable quality, a notable preservative, a notable insurance against either crudity or lushness, against vulgarity of any kind. Now and again he composed large and elaborated groups—as in his panels for the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh, which make up one of the most considerable extensive series of decorations ever painted. But he loved simplicity, and thought simply in his painting and he seemed to like best and be happiest in his treatment of single figures. It was peculiarly in these that his sense of pattern and of line, of long sweeping curves, never failed him.

He was very personal in lighting, which was simple and large, yet at the same time was often extremely picturesque in its arrangement. Its effect was not a little enhanced by his predisposition towards masses of reflected light which he used with great skill.

Restraint reaching to sobriety marked most of

his color. He liked to use a warm gray in wide planes and then to strike into it one or two prominent spots of rich or brilliant colors. Just before his death he built a very large studio in the Catskills and I believe that the trees and hills of his beloved Onteora got into the color of his pictures and helped toward that predilection for a whole gamut of greens which you may easily note on the walls of his exhibitions—gray greens, blue greens, olive greens, yellow greens, greens of the color of thick glass. His pigment was brushed easily and flowingly. Sometimes he painted a whole portrait with what artists would call a "fat brush," but usually the color was thin with occasional loaded passages, the canvas being sometimes hardly more than stained.

The sureness of his recording was remarkable and its swiftness was phenomenal. This of course was an extraordinary insurance against any kind of heaviness in his color, since overpainting is one of the worst enemies to freshness of surface. His swiftness of recording must be emphasized again. I should hardly dare to say in how short a time he executed one or two portraits which hung upon the walls of his drawing-room and which he called unfinished, though they were very satisfying, certainly to me.

Much as I should like to linger over his painting, I can not keep away from the subject of his eagerness to help other artists to find a gallery adequate to the housing of their painting. The search for a home for the National Academy of Design was the central preoccupation of the last years of his life. It was interesting indeed when he spoke upon any platform and any subject, to see how many angles of approach he could find to that *one* subject which was nearest his heart, the new gallery, which should some day house a dozen different societies of artists.

I have said that some artists are recorders, some creators and some are dreamers of dreams. Recorder and creator he certainly was. While he was still a child, he was for a while a little messenger-boy, and he never ceased to be a messenger, bringing stimulus of words and example, writing his name with Abou Ben Adhem as a lover of his fellows. And a dreamer he was of dreams; of a dream which we fully believe shall come true, when New York shall have a great gallery all its own and which we may link in our thought with the memory of that brilliant artist and devoted President of the Academy, John White Alexander.

*Edwin H. Blashfield*

## IMMANENCE

A rose I hold that whispers fragrantly  
Of Him whose heart it shows;  
So can I better pray  
To Him who made the rose.

With roses near He seems not far away—  
For every petal glows  
With life that took its pulse  
From Him who made the rose.

Sometimes I hear Him answer tenderly  
(I surely understand)  
For He is very near  
With roses in my hand.

With fragrance, form and damask petals soft,  
He speaks so gently clear,  
Though still as dreams His voice,  
I cannot fail to hear.

"Dear child of Mine, I made the rose for all  
My children 'neath the blue;  
My very breath of love  
Its fragrance breathes on you.

"I may not lift the veil that hides my face  
Until the mighty strands  
Of untold centuries  
Are loomed upon My hands.

"Yet close I come as loving sunbeams warm,  
That bid the flowers unfold;  
Or morning dew that gems  
The king-cup's shining gold.

"Through myriad leagues my vassal sun beams down  
The green-clad world to bless—  
And all the sons of men  
His cheering rays caress.

"If He may touch so tenderly your hand,  
Though far He dwells above,  
Have I less power to come  
As close to those I love?"

Then shadows flee and faith's deep afterglow  
Of peace dispels all fear;  
'Tis easy to be glad  
With whispering roses near.

*Ellen Burns Sherman*

